

Denver Program Puts Juvenile Offenders to Work

Management, Neighborhood Support Services, and other care providers that offer assistance to seniors and/or disabled adults.

IN ANTICIPATION OF A

federal court order in 1993 that would institute a cap on the number of juvenile offenders allowed to be housed in Denver's only juvenile detention facility, correctional administrators confronted the fact that the city had no sanctions for juvenile offenders charged with and convicted of municipal ordinance violations. Those working in the detention arena considered various options that could provide meaningful, structured alternatives for this offender population. The goal was to develop a program that would allow juveniles to perform useful community service rather than simply serving time in a detention facility.

As the result of collaboration among several city and county departments and agencies, the Juvenile Offender Work Program was created. The program eliminated a 5-month sentencing delay and allows juvenile offenders to begin community service work the same day they are sentenced.

The Denver Sheriff's Department operates two adult detention facilities. The county jail is a holding facility that houses an average of 1,800 maximum- and minimum-security inmates per day and has a rated capacity of 1,350. The jail is located nine miles east of metropolitan Denver.

The Pre-Arrestment Detention Facility is the intake facility for all persons who will be incarcerated within the jurisdiction. A 48-hour holding facility for the care and custody of persons arrested and awaiting other dispositions, it is located in metropolitan Denver and has a design capacity of 158. The average daily population is 300 inmates.

In addition to operating these facilities, the Sheriff's Department manages the Court Services Division, which provides deputies for courtroom security and the custody of inmates awaiting court appearances; a Civil Division responsible for all legal processing functions; and an Impound Facility that processes the intake and release of all impounded vehicles.

THE JUVENILE OFFENDER

Work Program was implemented in 1993 for offenders sentenced by the juvenile courts. City and county agencies involved in its development included the Denver Sheriff's Department, county and district juvenile courts, the city council, the Department of Public Works, the Code Enforcement Unit of the Denver Health Department Medical Center, and the Mayor's Council on Aging. Participating community agencies included Adult Care

Both male and female offenders participate in the program. In coordination with the Denver District Juvenile Courts and the Denver Public Schools, students with truancy violations are sentenced to four Saturdays in the program. They are required to attend school during the week and report to the Juvenile Court on Saturday morning for the work program.

The juvenile work program was initially done on a small scale, complementing a Mountain Parks Program utilizing adult offenders and operated by the Sheriff's Department. At first, work focused on providing community service to the senior and disabled populations. Graffiti cleanup crews were added in May 1995, in part because of a substantial increase in the number of juveniles charged with graffiti violations and also in response to an influx of federal and state funds from the "Safe City Initiatives."

JUVENILE OFFENDERS

are sentenced to the work program in lieu of paying a fine for municipal ordinance violations such as curfew, simple assaults, graffiti, and shoplifting. A deputy sheriff picks up the daily dockets for each sentenced offender from the juvenile court. After checking in all juveniles, the deputy transports them to job sites

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throughout the Denver area. A van transports each work crew and the necessary paint and other equipment. A deputy coordinates work assignments and serves as a liaison to the county courts, agencies, and citizens.

Work crews assist the elderly and the disabled by providing snow removal from the sidewalks and driveways of their homes, lawn maintenance, and yard clean-up. Juveniles and their parents or guardians volunteer their services for the elderly and disabled and must sign a release-of-liability consent form. Juvenile offenders also provide sidewalk sweeping services for public area lots and trash and yard clean-up for houses that have been condemned by the city's Code Enforcement Unit.

Graffiti removal crews are the newest component of the program. Job sites are located in areas throughout Denver and are identified through a graffiti hot line and by referrals from agencies and citizens.

SINCE ITS 1993 INCEPTION, 11,206 juveniles have participated in the program, including 8,704 males and 2,502 females. Participants have provided 15,092 community service hours and removed 8,103 square feet of graffiti from metropolitan areas.

Whether the program has been successful as a deterrent to juvenile crime is difficult to ascertain; there are no follow-up data on the program to measure this. However, community members have provided positive feedback regarding benefits derived by both the senior and disabled populations. It also appears that the interaction between the juvenile offenders and these citizens has had some benefit. The juveniles seem to respond well to these grateful groups and vice versa. They work well with them and enjoy being able to provide them with some assistance.

Observations suggest that the work experience and feedback may increase the self-esteem of juveniles involved in the program. The city and its citizens also benefit when juvenile offenders who may be responsible for the graffiti also take responsibility for its removal. This factor alone contributes to a more pleasant urban environment.

LESSONS OFFERED BY
the Juvenile Offender Work Program include the following:

1. A work experience in the community is more beneficial for young offenders than confinement in a detention facility.
2. Community service provided by juvenile offenders convicted of municipal violations offers much-appreciated

living assistance to seniors and handicapped citizens.

3. Participating in constructive community work assignments improves juvenile offenders' self-esteem.
4. Providing a positive, structured work experience is a cost-effective method of managing juvenile offenders charged with and convicted of municipal ordinance violations. The community as a whole benefits when juvenile offenders perform useful and productive services rather than become a drain on society's resources.
5. Ongoing communication and coordination between the court, judges, and jail administrators is a critical success factor in implementing and continuing a juvenile offender work program. The philosophy of each is important, and programs are easier to implement and manage when these groups work together as partners. The program thus far has been successful, and every effort must be made to continue to communicate this success to the individuals who make future decisions.

For further information, contact Captain Esther Marciano, Denver Sheriff's Department, PO. Box 1108, Denver, Colorado 80239; telephone (303) 375-5690. ■

AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE JUVENILE OFFENDER WORK PROGRAM GRAFFITI CLEANUP EFFORT:

- 1995-"Keep Denver Beautiful" award from the private Council on Keep Denver Beautiful, Inc.
- 1995-"Graffiti Removal Award" from the Greater Park Hill Neighborhood, Inc.
- 1997-"Keep Denver Beautiful" award from the private Council on Keep Denver Beautiful, Inc.